Disciple of Dreiser

KNOCK ON ANY DOOR. By Willard Motley. 504 pp. New York: D. Appleton-Century Co. $3.

By CHARLES LEE

LET it be stated at once: an extraordinary and powerful new naturalistic talent herewith makes its debut in American letters. But let it be added immediately Chicago's Mr. Motley has a deal of graduate work to do in literature's school of realism before attaining all the honors of his craft.

His resemblance to Farrell and especially to Dreiser, is striking. Indeed he has clearly played the sedulous ape to the latter; not a few readers will catch echoes in his book of "An American Tragedy." And, though he lacks that master's qualities of cosmic brooding and massive eloquence, he has something of his rugged narrative drive, his cumulative emotional power and his kindling sense of compassion. Dreiser would have been proud of his disciple.

The critical, however, will regret the oversedulousness of Mr. Motley's apings: the Dreiserian windiness of his style, the Farrell-like accent on verbal shock and the naturalist's blurry gift for adding detail and subtracting impact. Mr Motley is not subtle. He writes like a whole glee club of sob-sisters. And in the continuous din of his wailings and shriekings—his book is a sordid sequence of heartbreak in Chicago's slums: suicides, desertions, lost loves, lost ladies, alcoholism, broken mothers, broken homes, murders—the still small voice of critical reason may easily be overwhelmed.

For example, the undersigned expects to be a dissenting minority in his contention that "Knock on Any Door" badly confuses, even partly confutes, its own central point. This is an old thesis of naturalism—namely, that environment conditions the man. Given slums, poverty, police viciousness, political corruption, parental neglect and church failure, therefore, and we may expect, in due course, to be given crime as well. In general this is true, although in practice the theory often finds itself confronted by the mysterious fact of man himself. Thus men from the best-regulated families may become criminals as men from the worst possible homes and slums may turn out to be socially useful citizens.

IN the case at hand (and it is a dramatized slice of sociology), Nick Romano is introduced to us as an altar-boy who goes wrong at about the same time that his family suffers a reverse of fortune. He is taken to live in a him. His brother tries to interest him in Hull House. A professional sociologist gives him sound advice over the years. Two decent girls fall in love with him; one marries him to escape the bitterness of her own domestic hell (her story is told in a clumsy interpolation) only to find herself in an even worse emotional inferno.

How does handsome Nick react? Conscious of what reform school did to him, conscious of his wicked ways, he is still enamored of easy money and easy sex. He deliberately rejects conscience, boasts of his creed—"live fast, die young, and have a good-looking corpse"—achieves all three objectives. The case of Nick Romano, in short, is too complicated merely for sociology. Psychiatry must be called in, too. One may admit and deplore the effects of a physical slum. What of the ego of a man wallowing in its own spiritual slum?

Mr. Motley's Chicago Bowery comes to murky life. His poolroom people have animation. But his novel is distorted to fit a thesis; his protagonist is too complex for his role. A less intelligent Nick might have served admirably to illustrate the destructive influence of environment. The Nick here so brilliantly realized is a *willing* victim of circumstance and so belongs to Freud as well as to the social scientists.

And yet, "Knock on Any Door" achieves a powerful, although rude, vitality. It will absorb the individual reader as it will challenge society to mend its body and soul. Motley is one of the finds of the year.

Louis Aragon

AURELIEN. By Louis Aragon. Translated by Eithne Wilkins. 2 vols. 680 pp. New York: Duell, Sloan & Pearce. $6.

By JUSTIN O'BRIEN

THE appearance of a new book by Aragon could not be expected to cause the same stir in America that it does in France, where his mere name breeds controversy. A fervent Dadaist in 1920, he was one of the founders with André Breton of Surrealism,

Another Saviour From

THE END IS NOT YET. By Fritz von Unruh. 540 pp. New York: Storm Publishers. $3.50.

By S. STEPHENSON SMITH

WRITTEN in wartime exile by one of Germany's best-known dramatists, this novel makes clear to our minds the time of troubles we are living through. Fritz von Unruh sees the issue not in terms of a struggle for power, but against it. In one corner are all the Machiavellians, of whatever political color; in the other, the men of peace and good-will, the terrible meek who have the courage to depend on the sword of the spirit and the strength of an ideal. There is no third side of the fence in this clash of world-ideas. Nor is there anything remote or allegorical about Unruh's way of dramatizing the struggle against power and the power-maniacs. almost Rabelaisian laughter at the Nazi propensity in this direction, the story is actually poles removed from melodrama.

The inner mainsprings of the action come from the motives of two "soldiers of peace" who confront the whole pack of Nazis. One is an heroic rebel, Uhle, who as a captain at Verdun had sworn to erase the infamy of mass killing. He had been reinforced in his determination by the self-sacrificing heroism of a pioneer: "a very pale fellow * * * gaunt-faced * * * with deep-set ice-blue eyes and a black beard" who risked his life many times over to help wounded comrades, and enemy-wounded, too. (Corporal Hitler also saw him, and hated him.)

In the prelude of the novel—a curtain-raiser at once macabre and full of tragic memories—

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IN the case at hand (and it is a dramatized slice of sociology), Nick Romano is introduced to us as an altar-boy who goes wrong at about the same time that his family suffers a reverse of fortune. He is taken to live in a slum. He is brutally beaten by a well-meaning but stupid father. He takes to the street and the street takes to him: at first, young corner toughs, later professional delinquents, hoboes, prostitutes, jackrollers, panhandlers, gamblers, homosexuals. Reform school helps the process of deterioration, jail speeds it, police sadism brings it to climax in a suspensive duel to the death.

But Nick is not entirely friendless or without guides. His mother, although ineffectual, loves enamored of easy money and easy sex. He deliberately rejects conscience, boasts of his creed—"live fast, die young, and have a good-looking corpse"—achieves all three objectives. The case of Nick Romano, in short, is too complicated merely for sociology. Psychiatry must be called in, too. One may admit and deplore the effects of a physical slum. What of the ego of a man wallowing in its own spiritual slum?

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The main locale is Paris; the time is that last ominous week in August, 1939; the outward occasion is a secret visit by Hitler and his entourage to recover the Fuehrer's will, stolen by a Polish dancer during a command appearance at Berchtesgaden. Like many historical Nazi episodes this suggests movie melodrama. Apart from overtones of sardonic almost Rabelaisian laughter at the Nazi propensity in this direction, the story is actually poles removed from melodrama.

The inner mainsprings of the action come from the motives of two "soldiers of peace" who confront the whole pack of Nazis. One is an heroic rebel, Uhle, who as a captain at Verdun had sworn to erase the infamy of mass killing. He had been reinforced in his determination by the self-sacrificing heroism of a pioneer: "a very pale fellow * * * gaunt-faced * * * with deep-set ice-blue eyes and a black beard" who risked his life many times over to help wounded comrades, and enemy-wounded, too. (Corporal Hitler also saw him, and hated him.)

In the prelude of the novel—a curtain-raiser at once macabre and full of tragic memories—Uhle is revisiting the battlefield of Verdun after twenty-three years. In the very casemate he helped to dig, he finds the "pioneer" imprisoned by a crazed Prussian Army captain who is convinced his captive is Jesus and must not be let loose again on earth. Uhle rescues him and takes him back to Paris. The unknown soldier talks very little. He appears thereafter as a symbolic figure, at the crises of the action—the man of sorrows, who must be resurrected in each gen-

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The New York Times Book Review

SECTION 7

MAY 4, 1947

A FINE NOVEL OF THE MOUNTAIN MEN

"The Big Sky" Opens a Memorable Vista Of the West, and the Men Who Tamed It

THE BIG SKY. By A. B. Guthrie Jr. 386 pp. New York: William Sloane Associates. $3.50.

By JOSEPH KINSEY HOWARD

ADDRESSED "to enterprising young men," an advertisement in The Missouri Republican on March 20, 1822, sought adventurers willing to ascend to the source of the Missouri River and spend one to three years there trading with the Indians and trapping beaver. That was one of the most momentous items ever to appear in an American newspaper. The names of those who responded to it are written today across the maps of the West, for they became the fabled "mountain men"; among them were Jim Bridger, Dave Jackson, Jedediah Smith, the Sublette brothers, Tom Fitzpatrick. As traders, trappers and guides they searched out the trails and passes over which the nation's "manifest destiny" rolled in covered wagons to the Great Plains and the Pacific.

"The Big Sky" is an authentic and exciting novel about the mountain men and their lonely country. Mr. Guthrie, a former Montanan now living in Kentucky, has poured into his book all of the Westerner's fierce fondness for sun and sky and space, and he has succeeded in explaining (perhaps for the first time in fiction) what motivated the wilderness wanderers of a century ago, the rough and ruthless men who dreamed of freedom under the big sky.

THE novel's span is from 1830 to 1843, the brief period of the fur trade's fortune and decline thereafter, those mountain men who could reconcile themselves to country he loves. (This is Mr. Guthrie's first "serious" work, though several years ago he produced a Western mystery novel.) That is country, Jim Deakins thinks, "which didn't give a damn about a man or any animal."

It let the buffalo and the antelope feed on it and the gophers dig and the birds fly and men crawl around, but what did it care, being one with time itself? What did it care about a man or his hankerings or what happened to him? There would be other men after him and others after them, all wondering and all wishful and after a while all dead.

There are scores of vivid bits which attest to the author's experience. One who has ridden the ridges remembers how it is necessary to tuck chin into shoulder to snatch a breath from the wind, remembers that the wind "made a sound which wasn't a whine or a howl but just the sound of movement—a rushing, torn lonely sound." Only one who has wandered long in the hills knows how it feels to regain the open country: "Seems like my eye's been caged in by mountains and trees. Seems like it wants to run now like a dog off a tie rope." And those who have known the stillness of the mountain night when the wind has died will remember "overhead, from somewhere everywhere, there was a high, fine singing."

Only when a man was quiet did he hear it, but there it was then, thin and coming on and fading and coming on again, and it might have been the high pines talking, or the mountains, or time humming, far off and old, so that a body felt little and short-lived and so that he felt lonesome and hungry

WILLARD MOTLEY

(14 July 1909-14 March 1965)

Alan M. Wald

University of Michigan

Willard Motley was in all likelihood the most prolific novelist associated with the concluding years of the Black Chicago Renaissance. Nonetheless, two features pivotal to a discernment of the intricacies his life and work remain nebulous in biographical and critical scholarship. One is Motley's convoluted political connection to the city's principal tradition of African American literary radicalism; only in his late thirties did Motley emerge as a committed Leftist, and his fiction was largely concerned with European ethnic groups and, later, Mexicans. The second enigmatic peculiarity is the presence of a degree of biographical mystery; Motley was a gay man who did not identify himself as such, and, for sundry reasons, guarded and even dissimulated about his private life.

More precisely, Motley was a determined young writer coming of age in what is commonly called "The Red Decade," yet he had no link to Black literary networks such as the South Side Writers Group, nor is there any evidence of his association with the

traditional political causes of the Great Depression during the 1930s. Moreover, despite the traces of Marxist thought and a fidelity to the Left-wing protest tradition of social realism in his novels, Motley's African American fictional characters are customarily subsidiary, and African American culture only superficially and even stereotypically represented.

Motley was, furthermore, chronically hostile to suggestions of what he perceived to be militant Black nationalism, whether he detected it in the radical fiction of Chester Himes in his review of Himes' Lonely Crusade in 1947,[1] or James Baldwin's attitude toward white liberals which he protested in a letter to Time magazine in 1963.[2] Confounding his identification with the Chicago Renaissance, Motley relocated permanently to Mexico in 1951, a few years after the issuance of his first novel, publishing three quarters of his oeuvre from exile.

Nonetheless, an examination of Motley's life and writings, enhanced by new research and extended contextualization, renders an emended appraisal that roots him more securely in the Chicago Black radical tradition. Notwithstanding the thematic focus of his published fiction, Motley was unquestionably immersed in African American culture due to family and social connections. Starting in his teenage years, he wrote for the African American newspaper Chicago Defender, and in 1940 issued an influential essay on "Negro Art in Chicago" in the National Urban League's journal Opportunity. [3]

Moreover, in the early 1940s, Motley developed friendships with Left-wing Euro-American writers residing in Hull House, the social work settlement founded in 1889 by Jane Addams and Ellen Starr, as well as with radicals on the Federal Writers Project. Then, in the late 1940s, Motley emerged as a crusading revolutionary, variously associating himself with a range of Communist and Trotskyist causes. Despite the expatriatism of his last fifteen years, Motley's second and third novels, as well as volumes of unpublished fiction, were set in the city of Chicago, and he maintained personal contacts with emerging Chicago writers such as Frank London Brown.

Unquestionably a consequential source for many themes and strategies of Motley's novels, his personal life is marked by exceptional features that have been misunderstood or unrecognized by critics and scholars; the result has been a channeling of his accomplishment into the more limited categories of sociological, documentary, and "raceless" writing.[4] Most notably, Motley was actively complicit in promoting false information about the Motley family history, much of which was repeated in newspaper items, and then in scholarship and reference books up until the late twentieth century. An illustration of this appears in the 1955 autobiographical entry that Motley supplied to Stanley Kunitz for the first supplement of Twentieth Century Authors: A Biographical Dictionary.[5] Here Motley gave his birthdate as 1912 and stated that the painter, Archibald Motley, Jr., was his older brother. Moreover, Knock on Any Door

was dedicated "To Mary, My Mother," and Let No man Write My Epitaph "To Sergio, My Son." In fact, Motley was born three years prior to 1912, Mary was not his mother, the painter Motley was not his brother, and there is no evidence of any biological children or legal adoptions.

My own research indicates that Motley was born Willard Francis Bryant in 1909.[6] His mother was Florence "Flossie" Motley, the fourteen-year-old daughter of Archibald John Motley, a Pullman Porter who worked on the New York-Chicago "Wolverine" train, and Mary ("Mae") Frederica Huff Motley, a school teacher. Nothing is known of his biological father, Bryant, other than that he was a thirty-six year old boarder in the Motley family home on the South Side of Chicago. A marriage between Flossie and Bryant was hastily arranged, and then quickly annulled, so that the birth would not be illegitimate. Motley was told that his grandparents were his parents, that his mother was his sister, and that his uncle (Archibald Motley, Jr., born in New Orleans in 1886) was his brother. Bryant managed to impregnate Flossie a second time, resulting in the birth of Rita Motley. Rita was also raised as a child of Mary and Archibald, Sr., and the sister of Willard and Archibald, Jr. The subject of one of the latter's most distinguished paintings, Rita died of diphtheria in 1927.

Motley was raised Roman Catholic, serving as an altar boy, and grew up in a predominantly white, middle-class, German-American and Irish-American neighborhood.

Between December 1922 and January 1924, he published a children's column in the African American newspaper Chicago Defender under the name "Bud Billiken."[7] Around that same time he apparently learned the true identity of his mother inadvertently, due to an angry outburst from his grandmother, Mae. Flossie, however, had remarried and was beginning to raise her own family; she never accepted Willard as a son.

The revelation of this secret family history was traumatic for the teenage boy whose head was filled with romantic ideals. Over the years Motley's anguish about the circumstances of his birth gnawed away at him and was the subject of family quarrels. His tangle of emotions about Flossie was combined with a suspicion that the strong moral professions of his grandparents actually masked questionable behavior on their own part, although his devotion to Grandmother Mae was abiding. In the end, though, Motley was convinced of the profound hypocrisy of the Black middle class, a principal ingredient in his proud self-identification as an outcast and partisan of all those on the bottom rung of society.

Following his 1929 graduation from Engelwood High School, where he played on the football team and wrote for the school newspaper, Motley had hopes of attending the University of Wisconsin. Nevertheless, financial limitations interfered with this dream; so, after a visit to Madison, he decided to return to living in the family home. From Engelwood he plotted a series of adventurous travels in preparation for becoming a

popular novelist in the vein of Alexander Dumas.

In 1930 Motley launched himself on this project by taking a bicycle trip to New York City, and in 1936 he made his first automobile trip out West. In between, Motley devoted himself to the craft of establishing himself as a published writer, producing a large number of short stories and articles that met with steady rejections from local and national publications. His grandfather and uncle grew discouraged with him, but Mae remained supportive. She provided financial aid while Willard passed through a succession of odd jobs in a brewery, neighborhood store, and dress factory.

Motley's aim in traveling West was to gather material for future writing, and he recorded activities in his journals. One episode from which he kept notes was a month spent in jail in Wyoming, after he was arrested for stealing gas. He also chronicled experiences with numerous odd jobs on the route down to Southern California from Oregon. In Los Angeles he immersed himself in the Mexican American community, and then took a twenty-five day trip to Catalina Island. There Motley encountered an elderly British man, Wlliam Rix, who gave Motley advice on writing and subsequently carried on a vigorous correspondence with him. An even more momentous meeting occurred during Motley's return to Chicago via Denver. Motley had a chance encounter with a Mexican American reform school inmate named Joe Nuaves, who became the subject of several articles that would be published by Motley in the Ohio Motorist. Joe also became one of

several prototypes for his chief protagonist in Knock on Any Door, Nick Romano.[8]

After minimal success with publications from his first trip to the West, Motley launched a second expedition in 1938. This time Motley worked through-out his travels on a large manuscript, which he called alternately "Adventure" or "Adventures and Misadventures." Moreover, for his production of shorter pieces, he targeted less literary publications. These included The Highway Traveler, Outdoors, Automobile and Trailer Travel Magazine, and The Ohio Motorist, where his success rate of acceptance was considerably higher than before. When passing through Denver, Motley met with Joe once more, and gathered information about his reform school life and friends that would eventually become reworked into Knock on Any Door.

In 1939 Motley made a dramatic decision to leave his family home and relocate to a Chicago slum area known as the "Maxwell Street Neighborhood," in the vicinity of Fourteenth and Union Streets. There he befriended other young, aspiring writers who lived in or were attracted to Hull House on South Halsted Street, such as Alexander Saxton and William P. Schenk. They encouraged him to engage in a wide reading of nineteenth and twentieth century novelists, including John Steinbeck, John Dos Passos, Ernest Hemingway, James Joyce, Leo Tolstoy, Upton Sinclair, Jack London, and Sherwood Anderson. Motley also became familiar with the work of playwrights such as Anton Chekhov and Henrik Ibsen, and fell under the spell of the poet Carl Sandburg.

Motley's own production of short fiction now turned more directly toward realist techniques.

Chicago's Hull-House Magazine was launched in mimeographed form in the autumn of 1939, with Schenk listed as editor and Motley and Saxton as Associate Editors. Motley had by this time abandoned the paying market that he sought for his travel writings. Now he was experimenting with plotless sketches of the Maxwell Street neighborhood under titles such as "Hull-House Neighborhood," "Pavement Portraits," and "Handfuls."[9] Some of Motley's contributions would later be adapted into his published fiction. Soon after the demise of Hull-House Magazine, Motley began drafts of Knock on Any Door, which he originally titled "Leave Without Illusions."

Motley was brought into the Federal Writers Project of the Works Project Administration in the spring of 1940. He worked there for two years, during which time he evolved through the ranks to the status of Professional Writer. One of Motley's assignments was to prepare a report on an Italian American neighborhood in Chicago called "Little Sicily." He carried this out in March 1941, and produced a report in which he combined his own photographs with captions and a text.

Among the most important literary acquaintances of Motley at the Federal Writers Project was Jack Conroy, a Missouri-born figure in the proletarian literature school. Conroy, author of the novels The Disinherited (1933) and A World to Win

(1935), had edited the left-wing journal Anvil between 1933 and 1937. At the time that he and Motley became friends, Conroy was revamping the publication as The New Anvil. Motley submitted a piece of fiction, "The Beer Drinkers," to the magazine. Conroy admired it, but he determined the story to be too many pages for his little journal. The two became life-long friends, and Conroy offered crucial encouragement to Motley's literary labors.

When the Selective Training and Service Act was passed in 1940, Motley declared that he would not serve in a segregated military, and he wrote an unpublished essay ("I Discover I'm a Negro: Selective Military Training in Defense of American Democracy Places the Negro Just Outside of the Democracy"[10]) announcing his plan to be a Conscientious Objector. In April 1943, the Selective Service in Chicago agreed to assign this classification to Motley. He was then appointed to Civilian Public Service in Maryland, entailing physical labor. However, by that time Motley was already employed as a lab technician on a government job, and thus was able to appeal the assignment so that he could remain in Chicago.

Besides Motley's Hull House and Federal Writers Project activities, many other personal adventures lay behind the making of the early drafts of Knock on Any Door. Most important, Motley continued his special relationship with Joe, who moved from Denver to Chicago for a while, and he developed friendships with other young men who

had criminal associations. One of those, who would also become a model for Nick Romano, was referred to only as "Mike" in Motley's private papers. Mike stole from Motley and was the subject of a short story, "The Beautiful Boy," that was never published.[11]

In 1941 Motley attended the trial of Bernard "Knifey" Sawicki, a juvenile killer of four people, including a police officer. Afterwards Motley met the defense attorney, Morton Anderson, an advocate for the poor, who appears under his own name in Knock on Any Door as Romano's lawyer. Motley also conducted first-hand research at the county jail. His aim was to understand the operations of the electric chair and procedures for execution. Moreover, he arranged for a judge to review his fictionalized narrative of Nick's sentencing.

Nancy Jill Weyant's 1975 doctoral dissertation contains an entire chapter devoted to describing Motley's mostly unpublished "Short Fiction, Drama, and Miscellaneous Writing" of the years leading up to Knock on Any Door.[12] Dr. Weyant counts over fifty items of unpublished short fiction alone, between 1938 and 1947. Moreover, Weyant notes that, after 1940, these writings tend to become less sentimental and increasingly realistic, and more focused on Chicago. One of Motley's most sustained efforts, a 1942 three-act play called "The Keepers of the Wall," is the first fictional work by Motley to offer an explicit political stance. The drama features Dave, an African American

opponent of World War II, who refuses to take up arms against Hitler by serving in a segregated army. Moreover, unlike Motley himself, Dave even rejects Conscientious Objector status because segregation was enforced among pacifists as well. Dave identifies himself as neither an American nor "a Negro, but just one of two and a half billion, insignificant little creatures crawling across the face of the globe."[13]

In the spring of 1943, Motley thought that he had finished his novel, still called "Leave Without Illusions," and immediately began a new one, "Of Night, Perchance of Death." However, the process toward publication the publication of "Leave Without Illusions" would be grueling. The manuscript was 1951 pages after he typed the final version over the summer, and it was quickly rejected by Harpers publishers only two months following his mailing it to them in September. Early the next year he made an attempt to get it accepted by MacMillan publishers, which eventually resulted in a contract but also a demand on the part of the editors for major cuts in length and to eliminate many of the sexual (and especially homosexual) references. After a year-and-a-half of revision, MacMillan cancelled its contract and declined to publish the novel. The editors were still unhappy with the remaining sexual passages and aspects of the revised narrative.

In yet another emotional turn of events, Appleton-Century publishers immediately accepted the new manuscript, requesting only that the title be changed. As an alternate,

Motley readily adapted the phrase "knock on any door" that had already occurred at both the beginning and end of the novel. In 1947, Motley's Knock on Any Door was issued, and remained on the New York Times best-seller list for ten months. It stayed consistently in print until the 1970s, selling over two million copies in hardback and paperback. A condensed version, comic strip serialization, and a 1949 Columbia Pictures film, starring Humphrey Bogart and John Derek, were also produced.

The reaction to Knock on Any Door in the book reviews of leading publications was sensational. The New York Times hailed the debut of "an extraordinary and powerful new naturalistic talent" and the Saturday Review of Literature wrote that "not one [of its pages] is dull and many are calculated to make the heart beat faster...." Yet the Times also referred to the novel as "a dramatized slice of sociology" and the author as a "Disciple of Dreiser"; this introduced a theme, regarding Motley's alleged lack of artistic skill and a dated, derivative style, that would be repeated in harsher forms in response to his subsequent novels.[14]

The published version of Knock on Any Door came out at 504 pages. The narrative concerns an Italian-American youth, Nick Romano, originally from Denver, whose family descends into financial ruin in the 1920s. Nick's father, called Pa Romano, loses his grocery store and the family relocates to a poorer neighborhood. There the good-looking Nick, whose mother thought he might become a priest, falls under the spell

of tough-guys and delinquents. Following a false accusation of his having stolen a bike, Nick serves a period in reform school when he is fourteen. The experience is transformative and creates the foundation for Nick's succumbing to something of a naturalist view of society as a jungle where the strong dominate the weak. Nick concludes that the moralistic claims of the adult world and its institutions are merely masks for a struggle for power and control.

Thus Nick rejects adult society, and what he views as the hypocritical righteousness of his family, and is ineluctably drawn to the life of a street hustler and petty criminal. In making this choice, Nick achieves immediate gratification for his material and physical desires. Yet in selecting various gang members with whom to associate, he also satisfies a need for companionship based on mutual trust, attraction, and admiration. Although the criminal subculture is actually anti-social in its actions, it does allow for the feeling that one is building a new family and community based on comradeship uncorrupted by pretense.

The move of the Romano family to Chicago, in the hope of finding industrial work for Nick's father, acutely accelerates Nick's trend away from family and toward the street, despite the concern of two older men who befriend him. One is Grant Holloway, a liberal journalist who progressively moves farther Left in the course of the novel. The other is identified only as Owen, a lonely homosexual who becomes ardently devoted to

Nick. Toward the climax of the novel, Nick, feeling that something is missing in his life and that he may be heading for a disastrous end, makes an effort at self-reform. He embraces the fantasy of successfully honoring a marriage to Emma, a German American woman who falls in love with him. Emma is markedly unlike Nick's habitual associates on the street; in a sense Emma represents a vestige of the lost dreams of his youth for a moral and honorable life according to conventional institutions. Moreover, he is under the illusion that Emma's personal love might be sufficient to induce him to abandon his addictive attraction to promiscuity, deceit, and easy money.

Yet it is quickly evident that Nick's life in the gang has caused him to become so undisciplined that he cannot hold down a job, so that he steadily yields to criminal pursuits. Even worse, Nick suffers sexual impotence with Emma, and soon reverts to seeing prostitutes and Owen. These episodes culminate in a jail sentence and a confession to Emma of his bisexual promiscuity. Subsequently Emma commits suicide and Nick plunges even further into the criminal underworld.

Ultimately, Nick, pursued after a robbery attempt, explodes in rage and frustration by repeatedly shooting a sadistic police officer, Riley. Following a manhunt, where he is hidden briefly by a woman who had once protected him from the police during his Denver childhood, Nick is captured. Yet he refuses to confess. Although he is ably defended by Andrew Morton, and supported by Grant, Owen, and the multi-ethnic

members of his gang, Nick breaks down when the suicide of Emma is raised by the prosecutor. Morton provides a powerful closing oration declaring that society is guilty for the transformation of Nick into a criminal, but his efforts fail and Nick goes to the electric chair at age twenty-one.

In its form and style, Knock on Any Door bears many features of canonical literary naturalism. Assuredly, the socially-determined features of Nick's behavior, the court-room defense, and even the title suggesting that society and culture, not the individual, are to blame, recall Theodore Dreiser's An American Tragedy (1925). Equally notable, however, is the legacy of social realist fiction of the 1930s radical movement, such as James T. Farrell's Studs Lonigan Trilogy (1932-1936). In the works of Farrell, John Dos Passos, Jack Conroy, Richard Wright, and others, there is often a revolutionary, usually quasi-Marxist, underpinning to the plot and perspective. Yet markers of such a perspective emerge with varying degrees of directness.

Closest to Motley's approach is Farrell, who juxtaposes the fully-drawn Studs Lonigan to the more thinly-sketched Danny O'Neill. The former is a lower-middle class youth aspiring to become a "tough-guy," while the latter a prototype of a revolutionary intellectual. At the climax of the third volume of Farrell's trilogy, Studs lies dying while Danny appears in a Communist-led May Day parade. The juxtaposition hints at the potentiality of an alternative response, through Danny's behavior, to the failures of the

same capitalist institutions and culture that crushed Studs. In parallel fashion, Motley contrasts the evolution of the fully-drawn Nick Romano to a character named only "Tommy." Nick generally accommodates to the culture that brutalizes him, while Tommy turns his rage derived from poverty and repression into militant union activism.

When both Nick and Tommy are faced with the brutalizing reform school environment, Nick is disoriented; but Tommy proceeds according to a principle of social solidarity based on human rights. This is chiefly demonstrated when Tommy defies the racism of the reform school and its toughest inmates. Unlike Nick, whose first reaction is to defer to commands from racists, Tommy insists that he will associate with African Americans and anyone else whom he pleases. Tommy also organizes a mass escape of the youngest boys from the reform school.

Both Nick and Tommy end up being physically assaulted in the last pages of Knock on Any Door. Yet Nick is executed for his futile murder of Riley, while Tommy is beaten by anti-union thugs for his attempt to organize a strike. Moreover, Tommy lives to see another day, and to shed tears for Nick, about whom he reads in a newspaper. In effect, notwithstanding the focus of Motley on the criminal underclass, the role given to Tommy is a sign that Motley was affiliating himself with the Left-wing literary tradition that had battled its way into United States literature during the 1930s.

Despite the many naturalist motifs of the novel and Nick's own appropriation of

a quasi-naturalist outlook, the theme of Knock on Any Door is not so much that Nick is without choices or free will. Rather, Motley wishes to demonstrate that, beneath its proclamations of equality and opportunity, capitalist society is a relentlessly oppressive structure for the majority, and that one of its most powerful weapons is to obscure effective means of revolt. For the most part, the reform school events in Denver set the pattern for the remainder of the novel.

Upon entrance to the reform school, Nick is depicted as a potentially good and caring person who is stunned by the cruelty he witnesses. Although he is personally drawn to Tommy, and later on he remembers some of Tommy's words and actions, Nick can neither formulate nor sustain a vision of fulfillment. In a reified world, without access to a means of understanding the actual sources of his brutalization or the means of change, Nick pragmatically slips into a way of life that offers short-term pleasures but ultimately a miserable end.

In the reform school, the thuggish Bricktop is presented as a fascist-like figure, one who embodies the corrupt, power-hungry desire of the adults to dominate into the world of the younger boys. Furthermore, the key to Bricktop's authority is the capacity to set youth against each other, pre-eminently by employing racism to divide them. At the opposite pole from Bricktop in the reform school is Jesse, a Christ-like Mexican American who is in frail health and eventually beaten to death by the guards. In the

picture is also Allen, a tough African American who has gained acceptance because of his physical prowess. In contrast, another African American, Sam, is smaller and weaker, protected only by Tommy. The blond, fatherless Tommy and Sam carry out a close, homosocial relationship, with frequent physical contact. Nick is trapped among the contending forces; he often feels sympathy for the physically weaker characters, such as Jesse and Sam, but he lacks self-confidence and a vision that can lead to decisive action. Eventually Nick is pressured into fighting Bricktop and surprised to find himself the winner.

In the most crucial episode in the reform school, Tommy is captured by the authorities following the escape that he engineers with a group of younger boys. As an example to terrorize the rest of the reform school population into co-operation, Tommy is subjected to a humiliating public beating that suggests a sadistic anal rape. With his pants pulled down and naked buttocks exposed, Tommy is forced to bend over while a powerful, one-armed man named Fuller whips his backside brutally. The image haunts Nick for the rest of his short life, and it is the very last image in Nick's mind a decade later as he sits in the electric chair:

> Nick shut his eyes against the blackness of the head hood. Again he saw the circle of cloth and Tommy grabbing his ankles with the skin taught across his small behind...saw the hard light beating down, Fuller's arm raised with the strap, like a

> coiled snake, ready to strike. Ready to cut the flesh, ready to bring blood and screams and sobbing, whimpering, blubbering.[15]

Although Motley's fiction is often treated as a species of sociology, such crucial episodes indicate that he astutely perceived a psycho-sexual component to the institutionalized forms of oppression and social control in capitalist society. The suggestion in the image is not that Fuller is a homosexual; rather, that Fuller's sanctioned brutally indicates that he, and the society he represents, are sexually maimed or crippled, and achieve compensation through rape-like domination of the younger and weaker.

Thus the reform school provides a microcosm of the coercive institutions of capitalist system, stripped of all illusions and pretenses. The claim that the reform school actually aims to "reform" its inmates is openly treated as a joke by the institution's physical education instructor. In fact, the constant unleashing of adult male physical power on boys is the actual instrument of attempted behavior modification. As Nick concludes: "He knew how men treated boys. And he knew how they reformed them. He hated the law and everything that had anything to do with it. Men like Fuller were behind it. He was against them."[16] Among the inmates, gangs form in imitation of and in opposition to this adult power, and each gang develops its own culture of resistance. The pattern continues once Nick and the others are returned to the world outside the reform school.

Thereafter, Nick, in choosing the friends and associates that will comprise his various gangs, will try to reject the model provided by Bricktop, with its racism and authoritarianism. Yet he is incapable of seeing anything further, of going beyond petty crime to channel his justified rage into oppositional political activity. Despite their good will and desire for Nick to reform, Grant, Owen, Emma, and also his sympathetic Aunt Rosa, are unable to articulate a course of action that makes sense and seems viable to Nick. Instead, he becomes locked into a pattern of criminal life, of seducing women and taking money from homosexuals, from which he cannot tear himself away.

This evolution is certainly bolstered by the workings of the social and economic system, although Nick's evolution is not foreordained; Tommy, after all, moves in a very different direction. Moreover, Nick's brother, Julian, just a few years older, escapes the pattern, and appears to be moving toward success within the conventional social model of marriage and a career. Indeed, Julian's apparent escape from the fate of becoming a criminal or living in desperate poverty might raise the question of whether Tommy's route, that of working-class organization and collective struggle, is merely one of several options that Motley is presenting. Is Motley also suggesting that, with focus and diligence, one might still lead a satisfactory life within the social order?

Actually, due to the puritanical and hypocritical culture of Nick's society, Julian's marriage is based on a potentially devastating lie; his wife, Rosemary, has never told

Julian that she was earlier seduced by his own brother, Nick. Although Nick dies without disclosing this damaging secret, Rosemary was surely taking a great risk in hiding the truth about her past from her husband. The information might have been revealed during one of the many angry exchanges between Nick and his brother, just as Motley's own family secrets had inadvertently come to the fore with hurtful consequences. Or Rosemary might have become haunted by guilt to the point of confessing or acting self-destructively. All in all, there are few signs that any marriage can provide a happy ending in Motley's world; even Grant lives under the threat that his possible marriage to a wealthy woman might result in his corruption.

Thus Knock on Any Door provides little avenue for optimism within the existing social order. Nick may not be entirely unanswerable for his criminal behavior, but the odds are stacked against his ever fully realizing the humane impulses that came so naturally in his youth. Rather, circumstances combine with his growing personal weaknesses to produce the fatal outcome. Nick's addiction to quick and easy money is certainly a trait that he fails to bring under control; the quality is rooted in the deprivations of his childhood that escalated so considerably when the family's economic status plummeted. A more important part in Nick's evolution is played by his uncommon good looks. "Pretty-Boy Romano," as the newspapers will eventually label him, is able to gain the instantaneous sympathy of strangers, effortlessly deceive people

who love him, and quickly seduce an abundance of women and men. A triumph of the novel lies in Motley's ability to render Nick's powers of attraction convincing and credible.

Still, although the political logic of Knock on Any Door is revolutionary in terms of a suggesting the author's fundamental opposition to a class society, explicit political references rarely appear. These are chiefly in the background and customarily available only by inference, especially in the dim character of Tommy. Motley's principal strategy is to demonstrate how society progressively beats down Nick's intrinsically positive qualities. The reader is frequently reminded that, before the reform school experience, Nick's potential for behaving virtuously was authenticated by his rescue of a mouse from the jaws of a cat. On the other hand, Nick's propulsion toward the criminal life most often occurs on the heels of his witnessing or experiencing brutality by the social system. In particular, Nick's fatal decision to carry a gun, once he is located in Chicago, is the consequence of a depraved beating that he receives by the police. Understandably, he concludes that he must arm himself so that he will never be forced to undergo such a beating again.

The politics of the novel occasionally evoke the philosophy of French Romantic Jean-Jacques Rousseau; social institutions, such as the reform school, are depicted as if they are imposed upon and deform nature. Yet there are several traditional concerns of

the Marxist Left that appear in passing. The reader is reminded in the course of Nick's trial that the Chicago Police Department is linked to the infamous massacre of workers during the strike at Republic Steel in 1937. The police, the prosecuting attorney, the fascist-like Bricktop, and even Nick's mother express the racist and ethnocentric opinions associated with notorious capitalists of the era such as Henry Ford. In contrast, the poor community of Chicago is depicted as a happy melting pot, complete with multi-ethnic street dances:

> The crowd ringed a drunken Irishman who danced in the street, his hat sliding over his eyes. Then a colored boy and girl did a jitterbug dance while the crowd clapped hands, keeping time with the music....Then a Jewish girl in a high school sweater with bumps and her skinny partner in loud-colored trousers and glasses took over....A lean young Negro, black as the hat he wore, came out of the crowd and asked a pretty Italian girl in her teens for a dance. She smiled and nodded...They whirled across the dirty asphalt and back.... The crowd, three-fourths white, watched, applauded when they were finished.[17]

The internationalism of the Left is also explicitly recalled in the composition of Nick's own gang in Chicago, which is Italian American, Polish American, African American, and Mexican American. Nick is even called an "anarchist" by the prosecutor, and it is the one true proletarian on Nick's jury, a truck driver, who holds out longest against conviction.

While the novel contains substantial data about Italian Americans and German Americans, and there are a number of references to Mexican Americans and African Americans, the intelligence about ethnicity in Knock on Any Door is not eminently revealing or original. Most often a stereotypical character from a group is balanced by another one with opposite features; for example, among Mexican Americans there are Juan the womanizer and Jesse the saint; and among African Americans there are the loyal yes-man Sunshine and the independent Allen. Motley rather mechanically makes the point to the reader that each ethnic group consists of different sorts of people.

Naturally, with the presence in the novel of extensive narratives about the European-American families of Nick and Emma, Motley provides abundant details about Italian American and German American ethnic food and tradition. Yet even here, Motley's principal burden in regard to educating his readers about ethnicity is political. He wishes to emphasize the universality of diverse cultures, in order to militate against organizing one's values around a mythical norm. He also wishes to substantiate the omnipresence of discrimination suffered by most groups—not just African Americans and Mexican Americans. Moreover, Motley aspires to demonstrate the devastating effects of poverty and loneliness that cross ethnic lines, although he does not want to suggest that wealth and power solve these problems. What is required is a culture of solidarity among humanity.

Although Motley has been declared a "raceless" author by some critics, the phrase can be misleading. In his novels set in Chicago, Motley certainly fails to focus primarily on groups marked by race, or to see the world from the perspective of any particular such group. Moreover, the information he imparts about the culture and life experience of such groups—in this instance, mainly African American and Mexican American—is not especially profound. Yet Motley's choices in theme, subject matter, and approach are likely motivated by a keen consciousness of the tenets of white supremacism.

As can be documented by Motley's private papers, diaries, and correspondence, Motley was acutely attentive to the irrationality of ideologies of racial difference as well as the pain produced by racism upon its targets. His response, however, was to demonstrate that the shared characteristics among the poor of different ethnic groups are stronger than differences, and less meaningful than are class inequalities. Race and ethnicity are not to be ignored; to the contrary, they are ubiquitous. Yet they are not the definitive cleavage in regard to choosing communities of association. In Motley's philosophy, people are just people, and the rage of the have-nots should be aimed at ethnic and racial minorities but at those who engage in economic exploitation and domination.

To understand the literary achievement of Knock on Any Door, it may ultimately

be more rewarding to interrogate the consequences of Motley's dramatization of the sundered sensibility of the author in the text than to herald the authenticity of the ethnic cultures depicted. Grant and Owen, two characters who try to rescue Nick, seem to share features of a divided consciousness of Motley; one is the aspiring crusader for reform, and the other is the lonely gay man. Concurrently the perceptions and behavior of Grant and Owen aid in creating the near-mesmerizing persona of Nick as victim and victimizer, sex object and object of sexual exploitation, mouse and cat, and killer and scapegoat.

Motley, of course, is also very much present in the omniscient narrator. This is the case especially in the italicized poetic effusions, which appear sporadically in the novel; many more of these were cut during the course of editorial revision. Motley's views, too, seem to be expressed in the courtroom orations by attorney Morton. Moreover, Grant is probably modeled somewhat on Motley's novelist and Communist friend Alexander Saxton, to whom the novel is partly dedicated, and Owen, according to Motley's diaries, was inspired by a man he observed in a bar.

Nevertheless, some of Grant's experiences are grounded in Motley's own. In particular, Grant's meeting with Nick at the Denver reform school is a recreation of Motley's encounter with Joe Nuaves. Owen, too, reproduces some of Motley's behavior. Like Motley, Owen is a homosexual and not effeminate, and he offers living space in his apartment to Nick in the manner that Motley himself took in young men with criminal

pasts. Moreover, Owen remains loyal to Nick as Motley did to Joe and Mike.

Without a doubt, neither Grant's nor Owen's personal biographies correspond to Motley's, and neither is African American. Yet Motley is linked to the two by features of personality. In the mid-1940s Motley was in the process of transforming himself into a social crusader such as Grant pledges himself to be at the end of the novel; moreover, like Motley, Grant's efforts to change doomed individuals like Nick doesn't involve preaching, and Grant, like Motley in the 1940s, enjoys traveling to Mexico. Then there is Owen's ultimate loneliness, his apparent state of being without what he regards as a real family, his frustrated search for love--all recall Motley during much of his life.

Knock on Any Door's status as a gay novel has yet to be assessed. On the one hand, Motley introduced gay subject matter in popular fiction at time when such information was risky, even though Nick doesn't acknowledge being bisexual, and Owen never discusses his own sexual orientation. Moreover, the novel is to some limited degree a social document of aspects of the male homosexual experience in Chicago at that time. What may be most vital is that Motley doesn't reduce homosexuality to merely a personal problem of eccentric individuals. He tacitly raises sexual orientation as an question of social justice in the sense that homosexuals are akin to other excluded ethnic groups.

In truth, there are suggestions in the novel that homosexuals might be regarded as

in particular respects the group against which there is the most discrimination. After all, despite the varying economic status of homosexuals in the novel, social prejudice is depicted as virulent and widespread. Moreover, the legal status of homosexuals is depicted by Motley as so flimsy that homosexual victims of "jackrolling" and other violence can't go to police, protest, or fight back. Motley, of course, fails to treat any homosexual character as a complete human being, but this is comparable to his approach to characters who are African American and from other minority groups, apart from his chief protagonists. As with most minority groups in the novel, Motley's cardinal strategy is to subvert simple stereotyping by presenting several types of homosexuals. Thus Owen, especially in his patience and near passivity in relation to sex, is contrasted with a range of other gay men who appear in passing in the novel.

Might Knock on Any Door be adjoined to any kind of "Gay literary tradition"? As in the instance of James Baldwin's Giovanni's Room (1956), Motley's inaugural explicit discussion of homosexual life in his published fiction involves Euro-American characters, and even one of Italian ancestry who is doomed. For both African-American authors, this strategy may have served to distance the consideration of homosexuality in the books from immediate biographical correlation to their own lives. More than Baldwin, however, Motley shows the gay sub-culture as something of a loveless meat-market. In Knock on Any Door, homosexual social life seems sordid, unattractive,

and desperate; except for the idyllic time spent in Owen's room, existence as a homosexual brings one close to criminal underworld. In contrast to Baldwin's later novel, Another Country (1962), there is no example of the homosexual as a redemptive figure. Such an approach would be inconsistent with Motley's refusal to elevate a particular minority group above others.

On the other hand, Owen does grow in stature from a pathetic hanger-on to loyal friend. Nick's ultimate acceptance of Owen, after first denying to friends that Owen is a homosexual, is intended by Motley to be seen as a positive step, comparable with Nick's earlier expressions of anti-racism. The statement that Nick makes to Owen pointedly recalls Tommy's sentiments about Sam: "I don't care what you are. You're all right."[18] As Nick's feelings for Owen grow stronger, Owen is identified with that small circle of friends in whom Nick confides about his feelings for Tommy. Eventually Nick declares: "Owen was somebody who understood. Maybe because Owen, in his own way, lived outside the law, too."[19] Thus Motley places homosexuals squarely in the new community of human solidarity that he is constructing outside the system, alongside of criminals created by poverty and middle-class revolutionaries who take their side.

Such was the point of the compass of Motley's own life, after his transit to the Chicago slums in 1939. Rooting himself in the poor communities of Chicago, and partaking in a mid-Western gay milieu that also embraced Madison, Wisconsin, Motley

retrospectively assumed an identification with the Left literary heritage of the 1930s. Initially, his decision to announce himself a Conscientious Objector in opposition to World War II detached him from the hegemonic radical movement in Chicago, that led by the Communist Party. However, by the early 1940s Motley was attending classes taught by Communists at the Party-led Abraham Lincoln School and thinking about the 1930s "causes" that had escaped him at the time, such as the formation of the Congress of Industrial Organizations (CIO) and the Spanish Civil War.

Although Motley in the mid-late 1940s had some traits of a Communist fellow traveler, he was not a liberal attracted to illusions about the Soviet Union. More precisely, he was self-reliant revolutionary who was delighted to act jointly with others who avowed themselves in opposition to class exploitation and ethnic prejudice. This independence helps explain why Motley's most spectacular emergence as a political crusader came about by way of his association with the Trotskyist movement in Chicago in 1947.

This occurred when Motley played a leadership role in the sensational defense case of James Hickman, not long after the publication of Knock on Any Door. Hickman was a fiercely religious Southern sharecropper who participated in the Great Migration to Chicago. Although Hickman found employment in the steel industry during World War II, he had great difficulty in locating an affordable apartment for his wife and seven

children. Eventually he found a Black landlord, David Coleman, who accepted a bribe to let the Hickman family squeeze into an attic atop a three-story apartment.

Soon after, Coleman reached a decision to convert the entire structure into kitchenettes, which would liberate him from rent control laws and also allow him to rent out more space. When Hickman refused to leave the apartment building in order to allow this transformation, Coleman threatened to burn out the Hickman family, and several small fires were set on the stairway leading to the attic. Finally, in January 1947, a larger fire erupted on the third floor and spread to the attic, killing four of Hickman's children. Convinced that Coleman was responsible, Hickman shot and killed Coleman.

As it turned out, the other beleaguered tenants of Coleman's building were working with the Chicago Tenants League, an organization led by members of the Socialist Workers Party, a small Trotskyist political party. The result was that Hickman was offered a radical attorney, Mike Meyer, and a Chicago Defense Committee was established that included the well-known labor activist Sidney Lens, previously an acquaintance of Motley. Motley, in turn, stepped forward as a leading spokesperson for the case. He wrote about Hickman for the newspapers, and he personally convinced Marshall Field, owner of the Chicago Sun-Times, to give Hickman's side of the case fair play.

According to Lens' autobiography, Unrepentant Radical, the labor of Motley and

the Hickman Defense Committee created immense empathy for Hickman in the Black community; the population deemed the situation as indicative of the overall housing crisis suffered by African Americans.[20] Motley and the others on the Committee did not apologize for Hickman's shooting of Coleman, which they attributed to temporary insanity. They did argue, however, that blame for creating the conditions of the shooting should rest with racism, landlords, and the refusal of the government to provide a decent public housing program. The trial resulted in a hung jury and an arrangement was afterward reached for Hickman to plead guilty in return for a sentence of two years on probation.

Motley also sponsored the national defense committee for James Kutcher, a member of the Socialist Workers Party who had lost his legs fighting in World War II, and who was in 1949 fired as a "subversive" from the office of the Veterans Administration in Newark, New Jersey. Yet Motley was more frequently involved in radical activities in the milieu of the Communist Party. Most notably, in 1948, Motley supported the Progressive Party campaign of Henry Wallace for President and was involved with a number of Communist and fellow-traveling intellectuals in public activities. In 1949 Motley, along with many pro-Communist intellectuals, sponsored the Cultural and Scientific Conference for World Peace held at the Waldorf-Astoria Hotel in New York City, and the National Non-Partisan Committee to Defend the Rights of the Twelve

Communist Party Leaders who had been indicted under the Smith Act.

In 1951 Motley relocated to Mexico, from where he published We Fished All Night. This 560-page novel was designed to be his political and moral manifesto for the post-World War II era. From the onset of the violent events in Europe and the deployment of United States troops, Motley was acutely conscious of the effects of the violence and killing on the consciousness of participants. His rudimentary plan for the book was to track the fate of five men from Chicago in two volumes that would showcase the occurrences of the war in one and the postwar era in another.

We Fished All Night aggregated this data into one passionate volume that treated only three main characters, with one of the original ones mentioned just in passing. Those featured include a Polish-American, Chet Kosinski, who changed his name to Don Lockwood during an amateur theater career in the late 1930s. After losing a leg while fighting in North Africa, Lockwood exploits his stature as a wounded veteran to ascend in the Chicago political machine. The second protagonist, Aaron Levin, aimed to be a poet prior to the war, but he returns to Chicago in humiliation, following a mental breakdown and abandonment of his unit under fire. Growing ever more deluded about his writing talent, Levin embraces various religions and then Communism before acceding to full dementia. The third leading man, Jim Norris, commences as a visionary labor organizer in the pre-war years. Although a valiant warrior in battle in Europe, Norris subsequently

finds himself traumatized by an encounter he has there with a very young prostitute. Returning to Chicago, his marriage crumbles and his belief in the labor movement disintegrates as he conducts on an inner war with feelings of pedophilia.

We Fished All Night is a singular work in the tradition of the Chicago Renaissance for its detailed anatomy of the inner political structure of the city. This focus is expedited by the narrative of Don Lockwood, because the reader is given an interior look at the political engine functioning by payola and kickbacks. Ballots are incinerated and fraudulently signed, and voters are purchased. The proprietor of a large enterprise, the Haines Corporation, manipulates his leverage as a campaign contributor to devise for city police to disrupt a strike. As in Motley's other novels, ethnic prejudice—in this instance, especially against Polish-Americans and Jewish-Americans—remains a puissant cultural force. Racism against African Americans is broached, but predominantly as a constituent of the larger representation of ethnocentric intolerance.

For the most part, critics responded to Motley's second massive tome (fifty pages longer than his first novel), as if it lacked a coherent narrative. In the New York Times, writer James M. Cain called it "tormentingly bad" because Motley "neglected to give any discernible thought to the art of building a tale."[21] Another novelist, Harvey Swados, wrote in the Nation magazine that "it is harder to discover what Motley is driving at than if he had written an experimental or avant-garde novel."[22] The Library Journal called We

Fished All Night "strongly derivative in both content and style of the Dos Passos Trilogy U.S.A."[23] Time magazine, too, made a correlation to Great Depression literature, albeit a negative one: "But for the most part its political sermonizing stirs unhappy memories of the 'proletarian fiction' of the 1930s."[24]

In 1952, Motley acquired a house near Mexico City, and announced that he had adopted Sergio Lopez as a son. For the rest of his life he lived a somewhat secretive and isolated existence outside the United States. Return visits and a stream of house guests diminished over time. Following the restrained response among critics and the public to We Fished All Night, Motley's literary reputation began to wane. There was a momentary resuscitation, nonetheless, in 1958, when he published Let No Man Write My Epitaph. Reviews were severe but sales were satisfactory, and a Columbia pictures movie version was released in 1963.

Let No Man Write My Epitaph was technically a follow-up to Knock on Any Door, yet furnishes an original viewpoint on varied topics and adds in fresh material to Motley's rendition of life among the multi-ethnic underclass of Chicago. Although there are several flashbacks to episodes from the original saga of Nick Romano, Motley worked diligently to incorporate altogether divergent episodes that address narcotic addiction as well as race relations. The focus of the sequel is on two Romanos, both of whom are related to the original Nick. One is his son, Nick Romano, Jr., born to waitress Nellie

Watkins after Nick's execution at the conclusion of Knock on Any Door. The other is Louie Romano, mentioned in passing in the original novel as the younger brother of Nick.

Nick, Jr.'s mother, Nellie, endeavors in each and every manner to safeguard her son from the effects of the urban environment that had shattered his father. Yet the anguish of her life, intensified not only by Nick's calamitous execution but correspondingly by her own disconsolate working conditions, push her toward a sexual addiction to a young thug, Frankie Ramponi. Ramponi then hooks Nellie on heroin in order to control her. Over time, Nick, Jr., too, becomes enslaved by narcotics. Yet the sequence of addiction ends affirmatively when Grant Holloway returns to the scene, anxious to intervene and make amends by rescuing Nick's son from following his father to an early demise. Holloway is joined by a number of neighborhood friends of Nellie and Nick, Jr., who rescue the two addicts and demonstrate the redemptive capacity of the community of Chicago's multi-ethnic poor.

The parallel narrative in Let No Man Write My Epitaph concerns Louie Romano. Louie is roughly a twin of his older brother, Nick, and likewise commences to drift towards a life of crime. Nevertheless, he is thrown off course by the appearance of his Aunt Rosa, a character in Knock on Any Door. Rosa breaks the family silence about Nick in order to instruct Louie about the dangers that lie ahead. Furthermore, Louis falls in love with Judy, a beautiful African American woman. Although the relationship does

not culminate in marriage, the affair assists in bringing about Louie's reform.

While Let no Man Write My Epitaph was a popular novel, the critics were brutal in emphasizing its allegedly non-literary and even imitative features. Time magazine explained that the novel's only virtue was authentic speech but that even this "recalls Nelson Algren's excursion into the same territory" in The Man With the Golden Arm (1949).[25] The New Yorker claimed that "the book represents an extension of Steinbeck's soft-boiled Cannery Row characters to Nelson Algren's hardboiled Chicago."[26] Algren himself insisted in the Nation magazine that the novel's treatment of drug addicts was a fraud, "plucked, not from the corners where the traffic is plied, but off the national paperback clothesline as it stretches, drug store to drug store, coast to coast."[27]

Mapping out future literary projects in Mexico, Motley hoped to return in his imagination to Chicago for a third volume on the Romano family. Moreover, he had collected research materials for a multi-volume saga of his own family history. Yet the labors of his final years of literary productivity were devoted largely to writing up data collected from his Mexican residence of the 1950s. The most finished result was a non-fiction travel book, "My House Is Your House," which was never published outside of four chapters in Rogue magazine. Completed in revised form, with four chapters still in outline, was also a novel that he called "Tourist Town"; following alterations and cuts made by Motley's editors at Putnam, Ted Purdy and Peter Israel, the volume was

posthumously published in 1966 as Let Noon Be Fair.

"My House Is Your House" embodied much material about the food and social customs of Mexico. Yet it was also had features of a political commentary. Motley discussed the discrimination suffered by the Indian population, and he also indicted the role of the United States through impact of U.S. tourism and developers.

Let Noon Be Fair correspondingly provides critical commentary, especially on the Catholic Church and United States tourism. Further, Motley delved at length into the negative traits of the Mexican upper class. The town of Las Casas in the novel is mainly a fictionalized version of Puerto Vallarta, with some aspects of Cuernavaca and Acapulco. Initially the future tourist Mecca is still a small fishing village undergoing a transformation. Over the twenty years covered by the novel, a tiny number of visitors escalates to the point where the town metamorphoses into a capital commercial development.

Characters in Let Noon Be Fair are drawn from the entire socio-economic range of the community. This includes a sexually active priest who is in league with the madam of a whorehouse. In the novel, the Mexican government claims to prohibit foreign ownership of beach property. Yet Americans gobble up the major hotels and brothels, sometimes by use of dummy partners. Gradually, the U.S. standard of living comes to predominate, along with the English language and the sexually exploitative practices of the

invaders.

Before Motley could revise Let Noon Be Fair for publication, he died in Mexico on March 14, 1965. The circumstances appear murky, but newspaper reports and other sources suggest that he had been suffering stomach pains for some time. Motley was then living alone, and reluctant to turn to doctors for medical assistance. Apparently he thought he could medicate himself, but then lapsed into unconsciousness. By the time he was found by Sergio Lopez, his condition was grave. Lopez took Motley to a hospital near Mexico City, but an examination showed that a section of his intestines was infected with gangrene, perhaps because oxygen had been cut off. Motley never recovered consciousness, and a small group of friends and relatives flew to Mexico for his burial.

Scholarship about Motley has proceeded along two principal axes. The prevailing point of view in print preserves the canonical perspective of appraising him as the author of only one successful novel, Knock on Any Door, followed by an undisciplined failure and two pot-boilers. The tendency here is to affirm Motley's talent in areas of producing case studies and "raceless" novels.[28] These categories place him in the company of the sociological and documentary tradition, as well as among Black writers treating "white life," but also suggest that his work is relatively artless and lacking complexity of thought. Even though his posthumous Let Noon Be Fair addressed a new subject, culture clash South of the border, critics charged that Motley had produced "an empty carcass of the

panoramic novel" (Saturday Review)[29] and that his method of elaboration was "superficial and commonplace" (New York Times Book Review).[30]

Developments in the climate of literary scholarship in recent decades, however, have promoted thinking and research that is likely to lead to a second evaluation, one based on a more intricate understanding of the political era from which Motley emerged and a freshly detailed examination of biographical sources. These latter encompass and yet go beyond Motley's vast archives of manuscripts and correspondence in Chicago and Madison. From the ascending perspective, some of which is on the verge of appearing in dissertations and in print, the traumas of Motley's early and intimate life, his sexual orientation, and his growing political commitment in the mid-1940s, point in the direction of fresh angles for grasping his literary projects and appraising their underlying philosophy as well as originality.

Coincidentally, the several extant studies of the revisions that occurred prior to actual publication of Motley's novels, especially those addressing the changes and deletions compelled by editors as well as instituted in Let Noon Be Fair after his death, tend to confirm issues raised in the latest areas of research. Motley's early drafts indicate the existence of a somewhat hidden and more complex Motley, often struggling to find ways to indirectly communicate with the reader beyond the most sensational elements of his plots. A significant piece of evidence here is William Nells's 1988 analysis of the

posthumous deletions from Let Noon Be Fair.[31] These cuts include the elimination of a number of characters who bear partial resemblances to Motley, and who, if they had been left in the published version, might have provided insights into Motley's psychology, as well as artistic and political aims that are often short-changed in the edition now available.

One deletion involves five chapters about a fictionalized novelist named Melvin Morrison, through whom Motley had intended to provide commentary on his own creative process. Another set of deletions was directed at heightening the sexual aspects of the novel by toning down considerably Motley's deliberations about racial and religious topics. One group of these cuts was an eight-chapter unit about the racially-oppressive experiences of an African American, Charles Jackson, in respect to white residents of Las Casas; and another involved all mention of sex between Euro-American women and Black men.

Some of the material trimmed from Let Noon Be Fair embodies direct representations of Motley himself. One of these entails an incident where Charles Jackson challenges an autobiographical Motley for his failure to focus on African Americans in his writing, and Motley reaffirms his Black identity with a folk maxim. Moreover, the cuts made in relation to a homosexual character, Chester, transform a tragic figure into a villain. In this instance, as well as that of another character who is a prostitute, what has been cut out is background information about these characters that is

crucial to understanding their later sexual behavior.

Most revisionist efforts of Motley's work to date are just now emerging in dissertation form, in specialized journals, and in conference papers at professional organizations such as the Modern Languages Association and American Studies Association. Only Knock on Any Door remains in print, so that partisans of the other novels are unable to advance discussion by introducing them into classrooms or interacting with informed audiences at conferences. Even more challenging is the project of making censored, edited, and cut versions of texts available to scholars, or of introducing previously unpublished books and stories in venues that will facilitate academic study.

Notwithstanding, in the twenty-first century there is the continued expansion of the literary canon into areas such as Gay fiction and relatively neglected topics such as African American writers of the 1940s and 1950s. Therefore it is probable that a burgeoning if partially subterraneous circle of scholars will persist in returning to Motley for a deeper understanding of these dimensions of United States culture. The final report on Motley's literary achievement is far from registered.

Published Novels:

Knock on Any Door. (New York and London: Appleton-Century,

1947);

We Fished All Night. (New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts, 1951);

Let No Man Write My Epitaph. (New York: Random House, 1958);

Let Noon Be Fair. (New York: Putnam, 1966).

Selected Other Published Writing by Motley:

"The Almost White Boy," in Soon, One Morning: New Writings by American Negroes, edited by Herbert Hill (New York: Knopf, 1963). Originally written in 1940;

The Diaries of Willard Motley, edited by Jerome Klinkowitz (Ames: Iowa State University Press, 1979);

"Let No Man Write Epitaph of Hate for His Chicago," Chicago Sunday Sun-Times, 11 August 1963, section 2, pp. 1-4;

"Religion and the Handout," Commonweal 29 (10 March 1939): 542-3;

"Small-town Los Angeles," Commonweal 30, no (30 June 1939): 251-2;

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Craig S. Abbott, "Versions of a Best-Seller: Motley's Knock on Any Door," Papers of the Bibliographical Society of America 81 (1987): 175-185;

John F. Bayliss, "Nick Romano: Father and Son," Negro American Literature Forum 3 (Summer 1969): 8-21, 32;

Harvey Breit, "James Baldwin and two Footnotes," in Nora Balakian and Charles Simmons, eds., The Creative Present (New York: Doubleday and Co., 1963), pp.6-22;

James R. Giles, "Willard Motley's Concept of 'Style' and 'Material,'" Studies in Black Literature 4 (Spring 1973): 4-6;

Giles and Jerome Klinkowitz, "The Emergence of Willard Motley in Black American Literature," Negro American Literature Forum 6 (Summer 1972): 31-34;

Giles and N. Jill Weyant, "The Short Fiction of Willard Motley," Negro American Literature Forum 9 (Spring 1975): 3-10;

M. E. Grenander, "Criminal Responsibility in Native Son and Knock on Any Door," American Literature 49 (May 1977); 221-233;

Thomas D. Jarrett, "Sociology and Imagery in a Great American Novel," English Journal 38 (November 1949): 518-520.

Klinkowitz, Giles, and John T. O'Brien, "The Willard Motley Papers at the University of Wisconsin," Resources for American Literary Study 2 (Autumn 1972): 218-273;

Klinkowitz, and Karen Wood, "The Making and Unmaking of Knock on Any Door," Proof 3 (1973): 121-137;

Stacey I. Morgan, Rethinking Social Realism: African American Art and Literature, 1910-1953. Athens, Georgia: University of Georgia Press, 2004;

Jontyle Theresa Robinson and Wendy Greenhouse, The Art of Archibald J. Motley, Jr. (Chicago: Chicago Historical Society, 1991);

Paul Schapiro [pseud. For Paul N. Siegel], "Workers' Bookshelf: Knock on Any Door," Militant, 5 January 1948, p. 4;

Abbott and Kay Van Mol, "The Willard Motley Papers at NIU," Resources for American Literary Study 7 (Spring 1977): 3-26;

Alfred Weissgarber, "Willard Motley and the Sociological

Novel," Studi American 7 (1961): 299-309;

N. Jill Weyant, "Lyrical Experimentalism in Willard Motley's Mexican Novel: Let Noon Be Fair," Negro American Literature Forum 10 (Spring 1976): 95-99;

_____, "Willard Motley's Pivotal Novel: Let No Man Write My Epitaph," Black American Literature Forum 11 (Summer 1977): 35-38;

Charles Wood, "The Adventure Manuscript: New Light on Willard Motley's Naturalism," Negro American Literature Forum 6 (Summer 1972): 35-38.

Papers

Motley's papers reside at Northern Illinois University, Dekalb and University of Wisconsin, Madison.

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[1] "Lonely Crusade by Chester Himes," Chicago Daily Sun-Times, 2 October 1947, p.

33;

[2] "Stand Up and Be Counted," Time, 7 June 1963, p. 11.

[3] "Negro Art in Chicago," Opportunity 18, no. 1 (January 1940): 19-22, 28-31.

[4] See the discussion in Adam Meyer, "The Need for Cross-Ethnic Studies," MELUS 16, no. 4 (Winter 1989-Winter 1990): 19-39.

[5] Stanley J. Kunitz, ed., "Willard Motley," in Twentieth Century Authors: A Biographical Dictionary, First Supplement (New York: H.W. Wilson Co.m 1955), pp. 693-4.

[6] In 1993 I visited the Motley collections at the Northern Illinois University and the University of Wisconsin, as well as conducted interviews with Frederica Motley (Chicago, Illinois), Archibald Motley Jr. (Chicago, Illinois), Ted Pierce (Madison, Wisconsin), Frank Fried (Berkeley, California, by phone), Alexander Saxton (Lone Pine, California, by phone), and Milton Zaslow (Laguna Beach, California, by phone. In 2003 I conducted a phone interview with Zev Braun (Los Angeles, Ca., by phone). My research in Chicago and Madison was carried out with the assistance of Patrick Quinn of

Northwestern University Archives, to whom I am much indebted.

For this essay, I have combined new information with the standard sources that are cited in footnotes and the bibliography of additional readings. The most widely-available work on Motley is Robert F. Flemming's Willard Motley (Boston: Twayne, 1978).

[7] See Motley's memoir of his experiences in Chicago Defender (National Edition): "First Bud Billiken Tells About Himself after 15 Years," January 20, 1940, p. 19; January 27, 1940, p. 19; February 3, 1940, p. 19; February 17, 1940, p. 19.

[8] Ann Rayson, "Prototypes of Nick Romano of Knock on Any Door," Negro American Literature Forum 8 (Fall 1974): 248-51.

[9] "Hull-House Neighborhood," Hull-House Magazine 1, no. 1 (November 1939): 5-7; "Pavement Portraits," Hull-House Magazine 1, no. 2 (December 1939): 2-6; "Handfuls," Hull-House Magazine 1, no. 3 (January 1940): 9-11.

[10] The manuscript can be found in the Motley collection at Northern Illinois University, Dekalb.

[11] The manuscript can be found in the Motley papers at Northern Illinois University, Dekalb.

[12] Nancy Jill Weyant, "The Craft of Willard Motley's Fiction," Dissertation, Northern Illinois University, 1975.

[13] This manuscript can be found in the Motley papers at University of Wisconsin, Madison.

[14] See Margaret B. Hexter, "From Altar-Boy to Killer," Saturday Review of Literature Vol. 30 (24 may 1947): 13., and Charles Lee, "Disciple of Dreiser, New York Times Book Review, 4 May 1947, p. 3.

[15] Willard Motley, Knock on Any Door (New York and London: Appleton-Century), p. 503.

[16] Willard Motley, Knock on Any Door, ibid., p. 60.

[17] Willard Motley, Knock on Any Door, ibid., p. 88.

[18] Willard Motley, Knock on Any Door , ibid., p. 185,

1947), p.

[19] Willard Motley, Knock on Any Door , ibid., p. 189.

[20] See Sidney Lens, Unrepentant Radical: An American Activist's Account of Five

Turbulent Decades (Boston: Beacon, 1980), pp. 150-55.

[21] James M. Cain, "Into the Lower Depths," New York Times Book Review, 18 November 1951, pp. 4, 34.

[22] Harvey Swados, "Angry Novel," Nation 173 (29 December 1951); 572.

[23] Robert E. Kingery, Review of We Fished All Night, Library Journal 76 (1 December 1951): 2006.

[24] Anonymous, "The '30s Revisited," Time 58 (26 November 1951): 120, 122.

[25] Anonymous, "The Wire-Recorder Ear," Time 72 (11 August 1958): 74.

[26] Anonymous, Review of Let No Man Write My Epitaph, New Yorker 34 (23 August 1958): 92.

[27] Nelson Algren, "Epitaph Writ in Syrup," Nation 187 (16 August 1958: 79.

[28] This analysis is promoted in Robert A, Bone's highly-influential The Negro Novel in America (Revised Edition, New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1965), pp. 166-72.

[29] Jose Donoso, "From Heaven to Hilton," Saturday Review 49 (12 March 1966): 152.

[30] Alexander Coleman, "The Farther for Being Near," New York Times Book Review 71 (27 February 1966): 2.

[31] William Nelles, "'Tourist Town' to Let Noon Be Fair: The Posthumous Revision of Motley's Last Novel," Analytical and Enumerative Bibliography 1988 2 (2): 61-67.